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A.D. 446, ships began to dock at Shanghai, or Hu Tu as it was then called and in 1075 an official was stationed there to administer the customs. In 1279 the town, now called Shanghai (which may be translated as meaning "up from the sea") declared itself independent of Soochow and sent its taxes direct to Peking. It was however still too small in the thirteenth century to be mentioned by Marco Polo, who gave a detailed account of all cities of importance in south coastal China. The city walls were built in 1544 following the sacking and burning of the city in the preceding year by Japanese pirates.[19]

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Shanghai was the principal port of the Yangtze basin, and was also the center of the coastal trade between north and south China. Southern junks were not permitted to trade north of Shanghai, and vice versa. (This official regulation may have been influenced by the difference in the nature of the coast north and south of the city.) In 1812 the official gazetteer of Shanghai estimated the population of the *hsien* (county), which included an area of about 400 square miles, at 528,000.* Despite its commercial prominence, it did not seriously rival the older delta cities in size because they were in varying degrees administrative centers, a function which Shanghai has always lacked beyond its own metropolitan limits. They were as well or better situated for domestic or regional trade, but administration more than commerce was the consistent basis of urban existence and growth in the bureaucratic framework of traditional China.

Shanghai before 1843 had grown primarily on the trade of its immediate delta hinterland: tea, silk, cotton, and rice, and on its key position in the coasting trade which enabled it to act as an entrepôt and to distribute goods received by sea within the densely populated delta. But the wider water network, both sea and river, of which it stands at the focus was not fully exploited. It remained for foreign traders and foreign economic organization, implemented by the steamship, to realize the geographic potential of Shanghai's location.

* Ch'ing dynasty population figures of this period are, however, suspect, partly because of the practice of padding the census in order to impress the emperor with the prosperity resulting from his reign.